



# REDD+ Safeguards for Vietnam: Key Issues and the Way Forward

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## Key messages:

- (1) Now is the time to develop REDD+ safeguards in Vietnam so they can inform the design of the REDD+ program at national and sub-national levels.
- (2) The Government of Vietnam has already made significant progress in the design of a national REDD+ program that corresponds with safeguards defined in UNFCCC Decision 1/CP.16.
- (3) Vietnam's future REDD+ safeguards will need to address a wide range of concerns, from biodiversity conservation to local communities' rights.
- (4) The most crucial element is a nationally-owned and inclusive approach that lays the foundations for safeguard monitoring, reporting and verification in the future.

## Introduction

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) defines safeguards for REDD+ in Decision 1/CP.16 made in Copenhagen in 2010. Decision 1/CP.17 (Durban, 2011) reaffirms the importance of REDD+ safeguards and requests all developing countries undertaking REDD+ actions to report against the safeguards in the future. They address a broad range of social and environmental concerns ranging from biodiversity conservation to forest people's rights, together with the goals to avoid displacement of emissions and reversals of emissions reductions (box).

The Government of Vietnam (GoV) has taken on a pioneering role in capacity-building for undertaking REDD+ actions with assistance from multilateral agencies and international donors, and is now one of the countries that is closest to the development of a national REDD+ Program. In addition, the GoV, multilateral agencies, donors, international organizations and civil society organizations have initiated efforts to assist local communities and governments to build capacity for sub-national implementation of REDD+ activities.

Now is the time to develop REDD+ safeguards in Vietnam in order to achieve three goals:

- (1) Inform the design, implementation and first evaluations of Vietnam's emerging REDD+ program to ensure that environmental and social issues are considered in a proactive manner.
- (2) Develop a mechanism for monitoring, reporting and verification of how safeguards are addressed, and what outcomes have been achieved.
- (3) Take advantage of safeguard development to establish an inclusive forum for broad-based consultation and disclosure of information.

This brief seeks to highlight the importance of developing REDD+ safeguards in Vietnam now. In addition, it is intended to identify key issues to be addressed by these safeguards, and to propose a way forward for the development of a nationally appropriate REDD+ safeguard process in Vietnam that responds to the seven safeguards defined by the UNFCCC; fits the country's particular circumstances; and includes the whole spectrum of REDD+ stakeholders in Vietnam.

### The UNFCCC Safeguards

1. National policy coherence and consistency with the objectives of relevant international conventions and agreements
2. Transparent and effective national forest governance structures
3. Respect for the knowledge and rights of indigenous peoples and members of local communities
4. Full and effective participation of relevant stakeholders, in particular, indigenous peoples and local communities
5. Conservation of natural forests and biological diversity
6. Actions to address the risks of reversals
7. Actions to reduce displacement of emissions

## Achievements to date

The GoV has made significant progress toward the design of a national REDD+ Program that meets key issues raised in the UNFCCC safeguards. With assistance from multilateral agencies and international donors, key environmental and social concerns have been integrated into critical pillars of Vietnam's future REDD+ architecture. In addition, the GoV has implemented specific actions directly targeted at national realization of global safeguards.

The following components of Vietnam's emerging REDD+ program may be most significant from a safeguards perspective:

- **Consultative approach to national program development:** The GoV has established a broad consultative approach for the development of Vietnam's REDD+ program at the national level centered on the REDD+ Network and various sub-technical working groups, now also including one dedicated to safeguards.
- **Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC):** The GoV has developed guidelines for the application of FPIC, tested them in Lam Dong province, and evaluated the experience.
- **Benefit distribution:** The GoV is exploring the use of so-called R-coefficients and self-selection procedures for the distribution of REDD+ benefits. The R-coefficients would consider social and environmental criteria. The self-selection procedure would allow local communities to make choices about desirable benefits.
- **Participatory Governance Assessment:** The GoV has initiated a multi-stakeholder Participatory Governance Assessment, to be guided by three principles: democratic governance, stakeholder rights, and stakeholder livelihoods.
- **Participatory carbon monitoring (PCM):** The GoV has developed and tested a technical manual on participatory carbon monitoring with the aim of improving the understanding and engagement of local communities in carbon monitoring.

Clearly, the development of REDD+ safeguards in Vietnam will take place on strong foundations. Nevertheless, it will not be necessary to strengthen the safeguard process to inform development at national and sub-national levels, establish an inclusive forum for broad-based consultation and disclosure of information, and prepare for future reporting to the UNFCCC.



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## Key Issues

Past and ongoing work by RECOFTC and UEA highlights a series of issues that require attention at the level of national program design and local implementation in relation to the seven safeguards defined by the UNFCCC.

Safeguard 1: Policy coherence and consistency with international agreements:

- Policy coherence: There is clear potential for synergy with the allocation of forestland to local communities, as Vietnam's future REDD+ Program can help to expand forestland allocation and simultaneously benefit from the clarification of forest tenure.
- International agreements: Of particular relevance is the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) to which the GoV is a signatory.

Safeguard 2: Transparent and effective governance:

- The REDD+ program offers the opportunity to address some governance problems that have reduced the effectiveness of past forestry programs, such as the 661 Program.
- There are strong overlaps between REDD+ and efforts to curb illegal logging if both initiatives build on the recognition of local communities' rights.

Safeguard 3: Respect for the knowledge and rights of indigenous people and local communities:

- REDD+ offers a new opportunity to reduce forest conflicts, strengthen the existing rights, and expand allocation of forestland to local communities.
- REDD+ opens up new possibilities for community forest management in order to conserve forests, respect local communities' knowledge, and generate benefits for men and women.

Safeguard 4: Full and effective stakeholder participation:

- The national REDD+ program will necessitate renewed efforts by the GoV to acquire active participation of underrepresented stakeholders, such as local communities and civil society organizations, in participatory carbon monitoring, for example.
- Local implementation will require improved procedures for participatory land use and forest management planning as well as support for induced groups that allow local forest users to participate in REDD+ actions on equal terms.

Safeguard 6: Actions to address the risks of reversals:

- The REDD+ program will require novel introduction of a robust and credible performance base for the disbursement of benefits, creating a level playing fields for all kinds of forest managers, particularly local communities.
- REDD+ will aid efforts to strengthen forestland allocation and supporting law enforcement as key measures for reducing the risk of reversals.

Lack of attention to any of the above issues may not only weaken the design of Vietnam's REDD+ Program but also endanger the GoV's ability to receive international REDD+ finance in the future.

## The need for a flexible, nationally-owned, and inclusive process

The development of REDD+ safeguards will have to include three components. If all three are handled well, the safeguard process could become a key mechanism for consultation and disclosure of information in Vietnam's future REDD+ Program. The key components are:

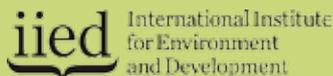
- Operationalization of safeguards, including their definition, testing and subsequent review
- Procedures for their future monitoring, reporting and verification (MRV)
- Recourse mechanisms for receiving and addressing grievances from communities

Three principles should guide work on the three components. The first is **flexibility and learning over time**, as highlighted by the call for transparency and flexibility "to allow for improvements over time" in Article 2(c) of the UNFCCC Decision 1/CP.17. The principle can be addressed through the establishment of guidelines for improvements in the three components above.

**National ownership** is the second guiding principle for the development of REDD+ safeguards. Social and environmental safeguards will need to be institutionalized, and their reporting integrated with the existing forest monitoring information system (FORMIS). The establishment of a national coordination mechanism will be critical, for example in forming a national steering group and facilitation team. Such a coordination mechanism should allow the GoV to harmonize the national safeguards with those applied by multilateral institutions (e.g. UN-REDD's Social and Environmental Principles and Criteria and FCPF's Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment) and key donors (e.g. Norway's International Climate and Forest Initiative). National ownership will require accompanying capacity-building measures.

Finally, safeguard development will need to employ an **inclusive approach** that involves a broad range of stakeholders, particularly vulnerable and marginalized groups. The future approach can build on the existing platforms, such as the REDD+ Network, REDD+ sub-technical working groups, and Vietnamese NGO and climate change network, and expand them in suitable ways. Consultations with stakeholders will need to be deepened in two directions. First, consultations at local and provincial levels will need to match the current intensity of national-level consultations. Provincial and local governments will need support for reaching out to REDD+ stakeholders through suitable capacity-building. Second, special efforts will be needed to reach out to all stakeholders, including various government agencies, donors, investors, multilateral institutions, and indigenous peoples as well as members of local communities, private sector, and civil societies. Local communities, in particular, need to be supported to take part in the development and application of REDD+ safeguards, as they are not well organized, have little experience of participation, and often find themselves marginalized in otherwise participatory initiatives.

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